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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a literature review of studies that address spirituality and religion specifically within counseling and counselor education. Results indicate that few studies examine the topic of spirituality outside of the clinical aspect of counseling, indicating that counselor education needs to consider how to educate students about spirituality. Because clients bring spiritual issues into counseling, counseling students should receive some instruction on spirituality in the interest of their future clients. Ethical and accreditation standards of counselors already recognize diversity, and spirituality is part of that diversity. Certain beliefs are associated with specific cultures, and counselors need to be familiar with a variety of these belief systems, including their own. The studies examined reveal that while most counselor educators recognize the importance of spirituality, little attention is given to the issue in counselor education programs. Spirituality is likely to find a place in the multicultural curriculum if counselor educators recognize its importance and adhere to ethical and accreditation requirements. The consequences of not addressing spirituality in counselor education include possible unethical treatment of clients through undervaluing client belief systems, ignoring an important client variable, and not attending to an effective coping skill of clients. If spirituality is not addressed in counselor education, counseling students will lack an exploration of their spirituality and lack awareness of how their belief systems are influencing their counseling. (Contains 44 references.) (GCP)

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# A Review of Spirituality in Counselor Education

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A Review of Spirituality in Counselor Education

The Ethical Standards for the American Counseling Association (ACA, 1995) and the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 1991) emphasize the importance of diversity in training counselors. Within the Social and Cultural Foundations Standard, religion is specifically addressed as part of our diverse society (CACREP, 1991). Proposed changes of CACREP standards for 2001 address the "growth of the human spirit".

Spirituality, as part of this diversity, is an important aspect of many clients' lives. Several researchers have shown that spiritual practices are an integral part of a client's well-being (Pritt, 1998; Lawson, Drebing, Berg, Vincellette, & Penk, 1998; Burke & Miller, 1996). It appears to be particularly relevant in working with clients living with HIV/AIDS, clients who have been abused as children, and those living with a chronic illness or disability (Hall, 1998; Parker, Horton & Watson, 1997; DoRozario, 1997). Spirituality is also valuable to African Americans and Native Americans (Matheson, 1996; Frame & Williams, 1996; Stout, 1995; Southern, 1996).

Spirituality has been considered within several disciplines including psychology, social work, teacher education, and nursing (Hall, 1998; Dudley & Helfgott, 1990, McSherry & Draper, 1997; Rolph, 1991). There are fewer publications in counselor education on the topic of spirituality.

It is difficult to separate and clearly define the concepts of religion and spirituality. Generally, spirituality is considered a more inclusive term, while religious faith may result from this spirituality (Pate & Bondi, 1992). While religion includes specific religious

practices, spirituality is often be considered self-transcendence, self-actualization, and a universal experience (Mack, 1994). Jung (1933, 1964) considered spiritual growth as a process of individuation. According to Jung, the self is central in achieving spiritual growth and a person achieves wholeness in synthesizing the conscious and unconscious parts of ourselves. Chandler, Holden, & Kolander (1992) defined spirituality as "..an innate capacity to...transcend one's current locus of centricity.." (p.169).

Shafranske & Gorsuch (1984) referred to spirituality as a unique, personally meaningful experience. Maslow (1971) considered spirituality as part of our human essence. Hinterkopf (1994) described spirituality as "a presently felt phenomenon involving ...transcendent dimension bringing new meanings... and growth" (p.166). As I reviewed studies, I examined those on the topics of both spirituality and religion in counselor education.

Worthington (1989) proposed five reasons to consider religious faith. First, the majority of the US population identifies themselves as believing in God. Second, many clients rely on their religion during an emotional crisis. Third, many clients do not bring up their religiosity in counseling. Fourth, therapists are often less religious than their clients. Fifth, many helpers are not as informed about religion as they should to be

helpful to their clients. It appears that numerous clients believe in God and rely on religion during difficult times. Counseling students need to be comfortable and knowledgeable when discussing religion and spirituality with their clients.

Bergin (1980a) (1980b) supported consideration of spiritual and religious values in therapy. He considered values to be a pervasive part of therapy. The author contended that science has lost its authority as a dominating source of truth and that values are inherent in science even though it has attempted to be objective.

**Method**

I have performed a thorough literature search through the ERIC and PsycInfo databases. I have chosen to review studies which address spirituality and religion specifically within counseling and counselor education.

**Results**

Numerous studies have examined spirituality in the clinical aspect of counseling (Parker, Horton, & Watson 1997; Lemoncelli & Carey, 1996; Ganje-Fling & McCarthy, 1996), however few have examined the topic specifically within counselor education. This is significant since it appears that counselor education is at the beginning of considering how to educate counseling students about spirituality.

Kelly (1994) explained that clients clearly have religious and spiritual concerns. This creates a need then for counseling students to learn the relevance of these concerns in their education. The author surveyed program heads of 525 counselor education programs and found that most counselor education programs do not offer a course

specifically on religion or spirituality nor do they offer a course with significant attention paid to these topics. However, the majority of the counselor educators considered religion and spirituality very important or somewhat important. Therefore, a discrepancy exists between the acceptance of the importance of these topics and the amount of attention given to these topics in courses.

Kelly (1997) found that counseling programs accredited by the AAMFT (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy) gave the greatest attention to spirituality and religion in counselor training. Sixty-six percent of AAMFT programs address spirituality and religion in their curriculum. The author also found that 52% of CACREP accredited counselor education programs address religion and spirituality in their curriculum. Spirituality and religion were absent from the curriculum of the other 48% of

CACREP accredited programs. The lack of spirituality and religion from so many CACREP programs is surprising since religion is explicitly mentioned as an area to be taught to counseling students in the CACREP standards.

Smith (1995) supported psycho-palliative counseling. Psycho-palliation includes a spiritual journey leading to enlightenment for the counselor. The psycho-pallative theory is other-centered, non-evaluative, non-judgmental, and through it the counselor seeks to care for the other, just for the sake of caring. It differs from the person-centered approach in that it does not have the goal of change for the client. The author saw the psycho-pallative theory as beneficial for both the counselor and counselee.

Bergin (1988) explained that therapeutic movements have moved from behaviorism, to psychoanalysis, to humanism, to cognitive emphases and that we are currently experiencing a paradigmatic crisis. The author suggested that a return to spiritual values is occurring.

Pate and Bondi (1992) examined the importance of religious beliefs in counseling. They considered religious beliefs to be an aspect of culture and viewed it as being significant in counselor education. Specifically, they recommend that it should be included in the multicultural curriculum of counselor education. According to the authors, just as counseling has addressed issues of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender, it should also address religion. Bergin (1991) said, our profession's empathy has not effectively reached the religious client. Pate and Bondi (1992) give specific details on how counselor education can include religion and spirituality. These suggestions include course content, student experiences, case studies, and collaboration with religious helpers.

Pate and Bondi (1995) reported on the survey responses of program heads of CACREP accredited counselor education programs regarding client religious beliefs and values. When asked, "How important is a counselor's awareness of a counselee's religious beliefs and practices in your program?", only 16% reported that religious beliefs are a very important part of a counselor's awareness in their programs. This appears to be

a low percentage of counselor educators considering the topic as very important. Thirty percent of CACREP programs did not address religious issues. This is similar to Kelly's

(1994, 1997) findings that many CACREP programs did not address religion and spirituality in counselor education curriculum.

It is unfortunate that some counseling students have been leaving their programs without training on religious and spiritual issues. Pate and Bondi (1995) explain that the counseling profession would not be satisfied with this finding if it were an issue of race or sexual orientation. They conclude that it is vital for religion and spirituality to be included in counselor education. After a thorough review of the clinical implications of including

spirituality, Mack (1994) also advocates that spirituality should be addressed in counselor education.

Grimm (1994) maintained that therapists' values are bound to be communicated to clients through our theoretical orientations and therapeutic goals. For this reason, he argued that spiritual and religious values cannot and should not be eliminated from therapy. He supports therapists receiving training on dealing with spiritual and religious issues.

Maher & Hunt (1993) urged counselors to recognize their own definition of spirituality as they advocated for a more concrete and easily understood definition of spirituality. The authors supported the use of spirituality in the counseling process as a way to bring out the health and goodness of clients.

Heise & Steitz (1991) encouraged counselors to be aware of the way in which clients are taught morality from the Christian fundamentalist perspective. The authors pressed for a focus on spiritual growth rather than spiritual perfectionism in counseling.

Mattson (1994) claimed that counselors should not be afraid of spiritual or religious issues which arise in the field of counseling. He gave specific recommendations for working with spiritual and religious issues in counseling, one of which is to allow the client to bring up religious issues. He recommended that counseling students be exposed to spiritual and religious issues just as they are exposed to other multicultural issues.

**Implications and Conclusions**

Spirituality is a vital piece of our clients' lives. For many, it is a coping strategy in difficult times. For some, it is a way of life and influences each decision they make. The clinical side of counseling has found a wide range of applications for spirituality. It is clear that clients bring spiritual issues into counseling. Counseling students should receive some instruction on spirituality in order to best help their future clients. As stated, our ethical and accreditation standards recognize diversity. Spirituality is a part of this diversity. Certain beliefs are associated with specific cultures and counselors need to be familiar with a variety of these belief systems including their own.

It is interesting to note that articles against incorporating spirituality into counseling were not found. A few articles were found against integrating spirituality into education and psychology (Blake, 1996; Ellis, 1980; Walls, 1980). It would be helpful to hear from counselor educators and counselors who are against integrating spirituality into counselor education. This would create an intriguing dialogue about the topic and might generate solutions on appropriate ways to incorporate spirituality into counselor education.

There are multiple definitions of spirituality and the concept continues to evolve. As a result, the idea of spirituality is likely to be considered in numerous ways by numerous clients, counselors, and counselor educators. There are a variety of ways of knowing and spirituality appears to be one of these ways.

The studies I examined in this review showed that while most counselor educators recognize the importance of spirituality, little attention is given to the issue in counselor education programs. Spirituality is likely to find a place in the multicultural curriculum if counselor educators recognize its importance and adhere to ethical and accreditation requirements.

The consequences of not addressing spirituality in counselor education include possible unethical treatment of clients through undervaluing client belief systems, ignoring an important client variable, and not attending to an effective coping skill of clients. If we do not address spirituality in counselor education, our counseling students will lack an exploration of their own spirituality and lack awareness of how their belief systems are influencing their counseling.

Hinterkopf (1994) explained that by not training counselors on spiritual and religious dimensions, we risk being insensitive to spiritual and religious concerns of clients. The author added that ignoring this dimension means missed opportunities for supporting psychological growth.

Future research is needed on how counselor educators can effectively integrate spirituality into counselor education programs. Is a course on spirituality in counseling needed? If so, what should be included in courses on spirituality in counseling? Is the

multicultural curriculum the appropriate place for spirituality in counseling? How diversely does spirituality impact counselor education? What are counseling students' ideas on spirituality in counseling? There are numerous questions to ask of spirituality in counselor education. The dialogue has only begun.

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